

# Bokhara

## Land of the Rainbow Robe & Crumbled Glories

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**M**ODERN Bokhara is a country of strong contrasts. Mountainous in the middle and eastern portions, it has extensive desert wastes and steppes, and only the seasonal melting of the winter snows renders it habitable. Summer quickly follows spring, and drought and heat change the scene from flowers and fertility to sun-scorched brown remnants of vegetation, save where the green oases relieve the eye. The temperature varies greatly; in the Pamir valleys it may fall to 54° F. below freezing point, while in summer the heat is terrible, often above 122° F., with the burning garmsal (heat-wind) in the level country, filling the air with dust and obscuring the sun, as an added trial.

The boundaries of the Ameerate of Bokhara run mainly eastward from Khiva to the Alai Mountains. Towards Zarafshan the eastern line turns almost due south, embracing in a large curve Nura-tau, and from here the north boundary follows the Samarkand ranges eastward. In the Alai Mountains it again turns south through High Pamir to Langar Kish at the junction of the Pamir Daria and the Pandsh in Wakkan. The Amu Daria (River Oxus) forms the southern boundary and the Kara Kum Desert the western.

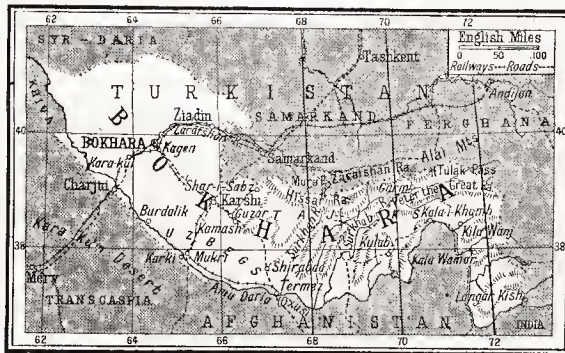
The town of Bokhara, surrounded by a bastioned wall about 23 feet high, has an area of about two and a quarter square miles, and creates a curious impression

of loneliness when first seen. With its flat roofs built together and of the same colour as the loess, its walls, streets, and tombs resemble a plateau furrowed by rain; no pointed towers, and few minarets, rise above the level; but the monotony is pleasantly relieved by the many cupolas, glazed with green or blue tiles or smeared with loess or plaster, and by the numerous thimble-shaped towers of mosques and medresses shining brilliantly in the sun. Above the whole stands the castle of the Ameer, the Ark, built on a hill in the middle of the town and encircled by a high crenellated wall, so that none may gaze into the precincts of the ruler.

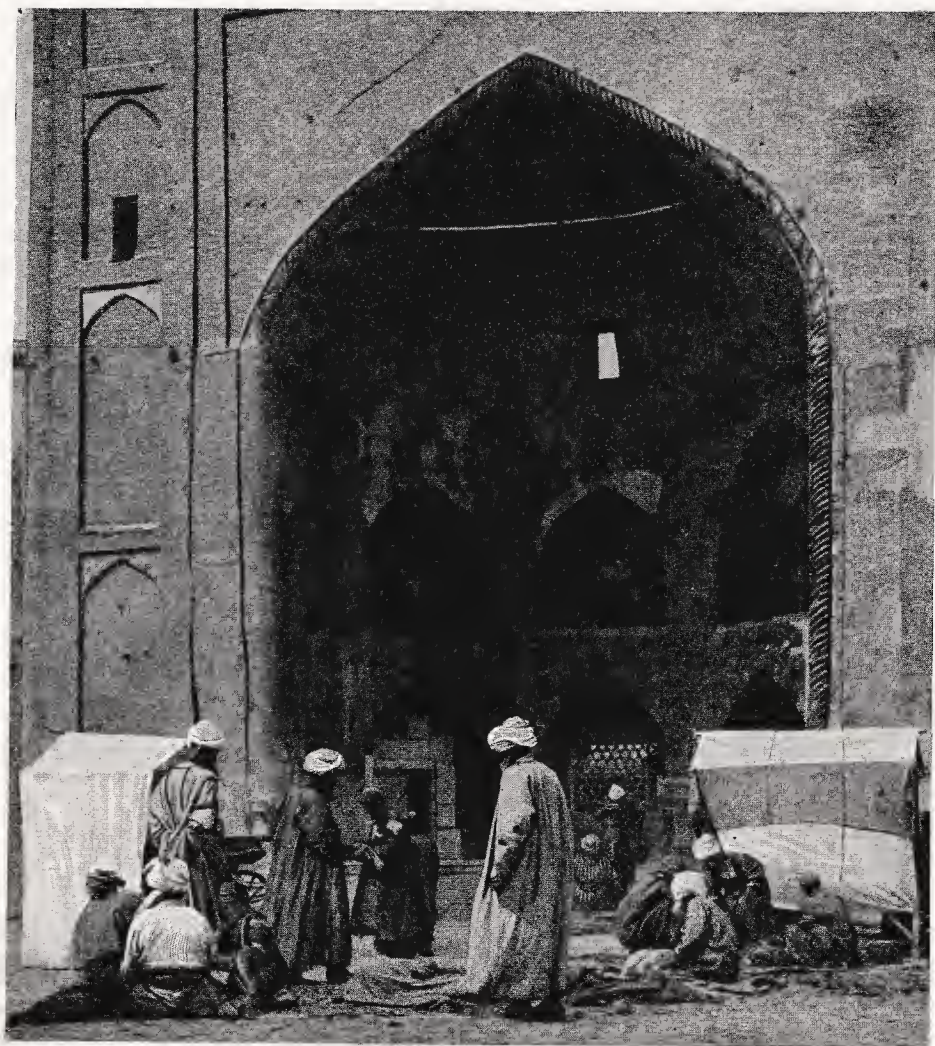
Here and there tall mulberry and apricot trees, a walnut, willow, or elm peep over the roofs, and occasionally trees form a group of refreshing green round the ponds (havz) or by the irrigating canals.

At midday in summer hardly a movement is to be seen; but from early morning till noon, and again later, the white turbans flit like heads of cotton in the fields of autumn. Then there is plenty to see and hear; dogs howl, donkeys bray, doves coo, thousands of storks cackle unmelodiously from the cupolas where they nest, and

the general hum of human voices prevails. Through the streets pass long caravans of camels, horses, or donkeys, or endless processions of loaded arabas go by, accompanied by loud cries and



BOKHARA AND ITS PEOPLES



#### FEEDING SEARCHERS AFTER WISDOM AT THE GATE TO KNOWLEDGE

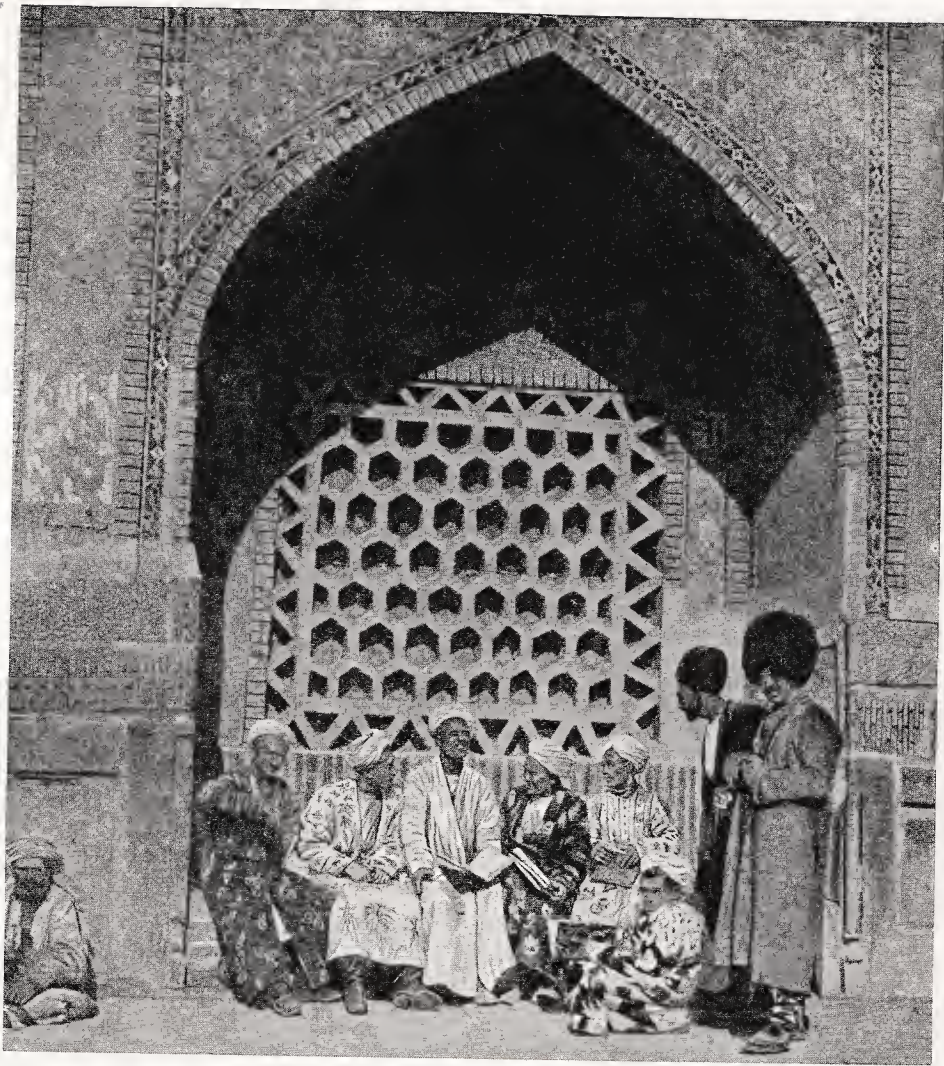
This is one of Bokhara's hundred and more centres of mystic lore, fanatic faith, secret heresies, and political intrigues. By wisely choosing his master, every student can obtain what he wants, from the last scheme in Turkish Pan-Turanism to the newest ideas in veiled free-thinking. And hawkers by the porch provide him with good and cheap refreshments

*Photo, Miss C. Y. Hunter*

the noise of hard blows. The bustle of life centres in the bazaars, the maidans, or market-places, and at the ponds, which are social gathering-places; and the mingling of all shades of the Asian populations makes an extremely picturesque sight. Tajiks and Uzbeks with bright-hued silk and cotton khalats and white, blue, or red striped turbans are in the majority, but Afghans, Kirghiz, Jews, Turcomans, Hindus, and other Orientals, all

differently attired, mingle in the motley crowd and add to the confusion. The Bokharian metal-workers are noted, and at their forges, behind the shops, they solder and hammer with energy and noise enough for all the smiths in creation. The street of the saddlers is interesting; and in the maidan between the medresse of Mir Arab and the mosque of Nasht-i-Kalan the scene is gay indeed. Here is the cotton fair, where the cotton is packed





#### A LITTLE SCHOOL OF THE PORCH AND ITS NOMAD VISITORS

Bokhara has more than 100 colleges and 350 mosque schools, but in the new stir of thought, teaching and study go on as much in the open air as in the old, picturesque, dilapidated public buildings. Here, in a fine porch, a learned man is instructing his followers, and interesting also a Turcoman, in shaggy sheepskin hat, and a wilder Uzbek in clipped cap

*Photo, Maynard Owen Williams*

in bales and loaded on splendid camels ; here caravans pass continually, and by the fruiterers' tables, shaded by durra-nets, cluster bargaining women, ghostly in blue cotton wrapper and mystery-imparting veil.

Karshi, the second town in importance, is famous for magnificent orchards, and formerly was a centre of the knife industry, producing beautiful damascened blades inlaid with threads of silver and gold. It has about 25,000

inhabitants, chiefly Uzbeks. Shahar or Shar-i-Sabz is an historic town of about 20,000 inhabitants ; it was once well fortified, and within the district of its oasis are no fewer than 90 mosques. Its sister town, Kitab, has a Bokharian garrison, and the Ameer often resides there with his harem and numerous retinue. In its strongly fortified citadel lives the Beg of the district, also the Ameer when he pays a visit. Many other towns exercise a more or less





#### STATELY DERVISH IN A GLORY OF QUILTED COLOURS

He is a bit of a mystic and more of a mendicant, but he observes the Bokhara custom that all males should be distinguished from soberly clad females by brilliantly variegated attire. The fabric may be poor, but the hues must be rich. Bokhara is a flower-pot of mud, and its men are the flowers; there is nothing like them to be found elsewhere

*Photo, Sirdar Ikbal Ali Shah*





THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN BY THE MOSQUE IN BOKHARA

No European beggar women would deck themselves out in their best necklaces, amulets, and bracelets, while holding a bowl for alms; but this aged creature with the strong face of the warlike, hated desert folk, seems to demand charity. She silently appeals only to men of her own race, who know her story. Observe the curious rings on her shoes

*Photo, Sirdar Ikhbal Ali Shah*

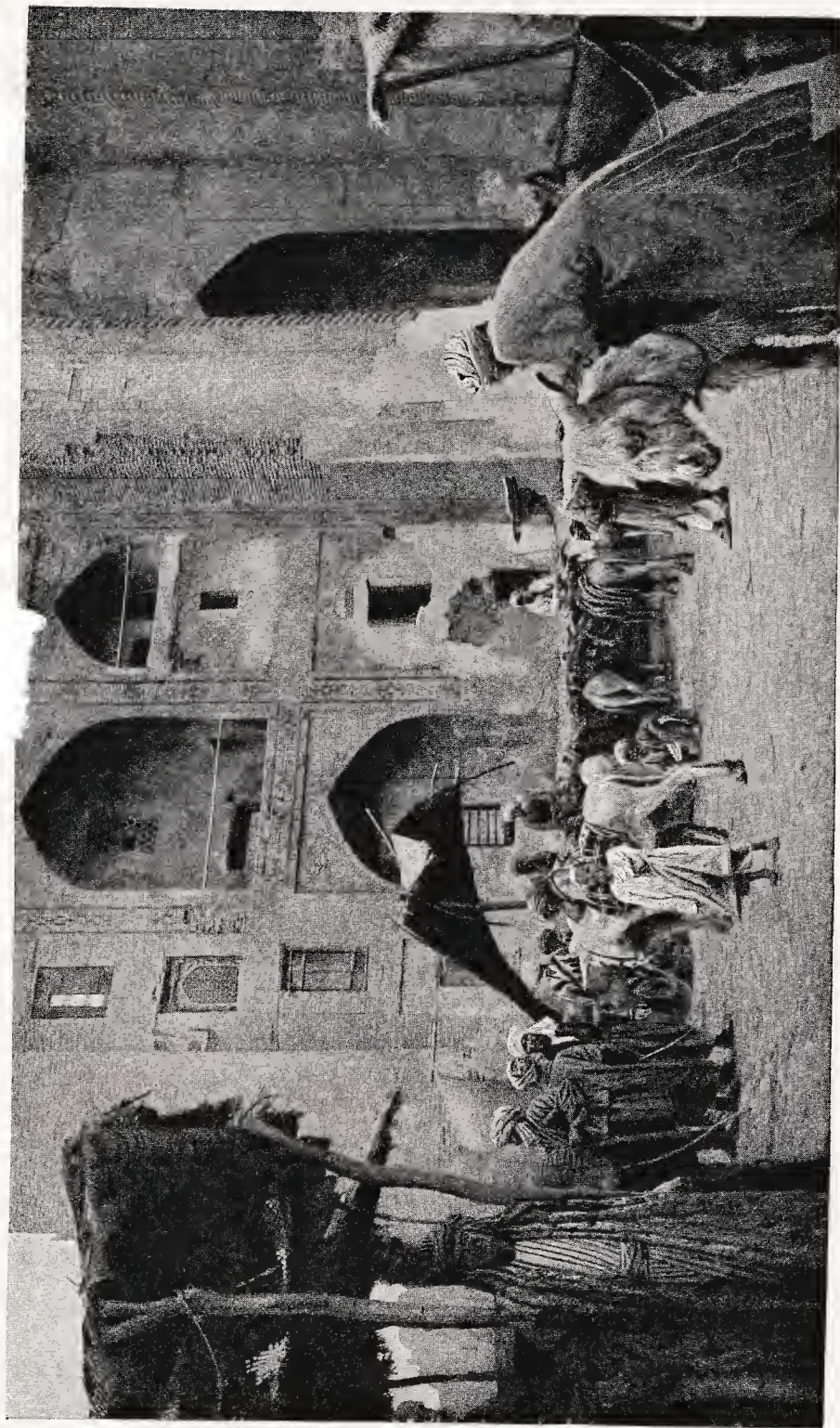




# SART MERCHANTS OF THE GREAT CARACUL FUR MARKET OF MIDDLE ASIA

The Sarts are a half-breed Persian stock, who people the towns of the Amirate, hold most of the trade, and lose much of their wealth to the high-handed Uzbeys. Here they are gathered in the fur market of the capital city, where the fine Caracul lambs are bought from the desertmen, and then dressed. The best skins are obtained from new-born lambs, a rare kind of sheep





# NOOK OF GLORIOUS OLD ARCHITECTURAL SPLENDOUR IN A BOKHARIAN COLLEGE SQUARE

Since the desert tribesmen won the city, everything of beauty has decayed. Yet in nooks like this, glimpses can be caught of the old wizard loveliness of street and square. The simply-planned buildings are but canvases for wonderful colour effects. This dilapidated corner shines with tiles, blending into the hues of a kingfisher's wings. It was the work of the artistic Sarts in the great age of their prosperity

*Photo, Miss C. Y. Hunter*





#### SOME OF THE OLD MASTERS OF THE BOKHARA AMEERATE

They are Uzbeg tribesmen, who have driven eastward through the land they conquered, and found freedom of life in the high Pamir. A fierce, roaming Turki stock, with their kinsmen still dominant in Bokhara and inclined to regard the natives as their serfs, they may ride back at any time, now Russia has gone, to swell a fanatic movement

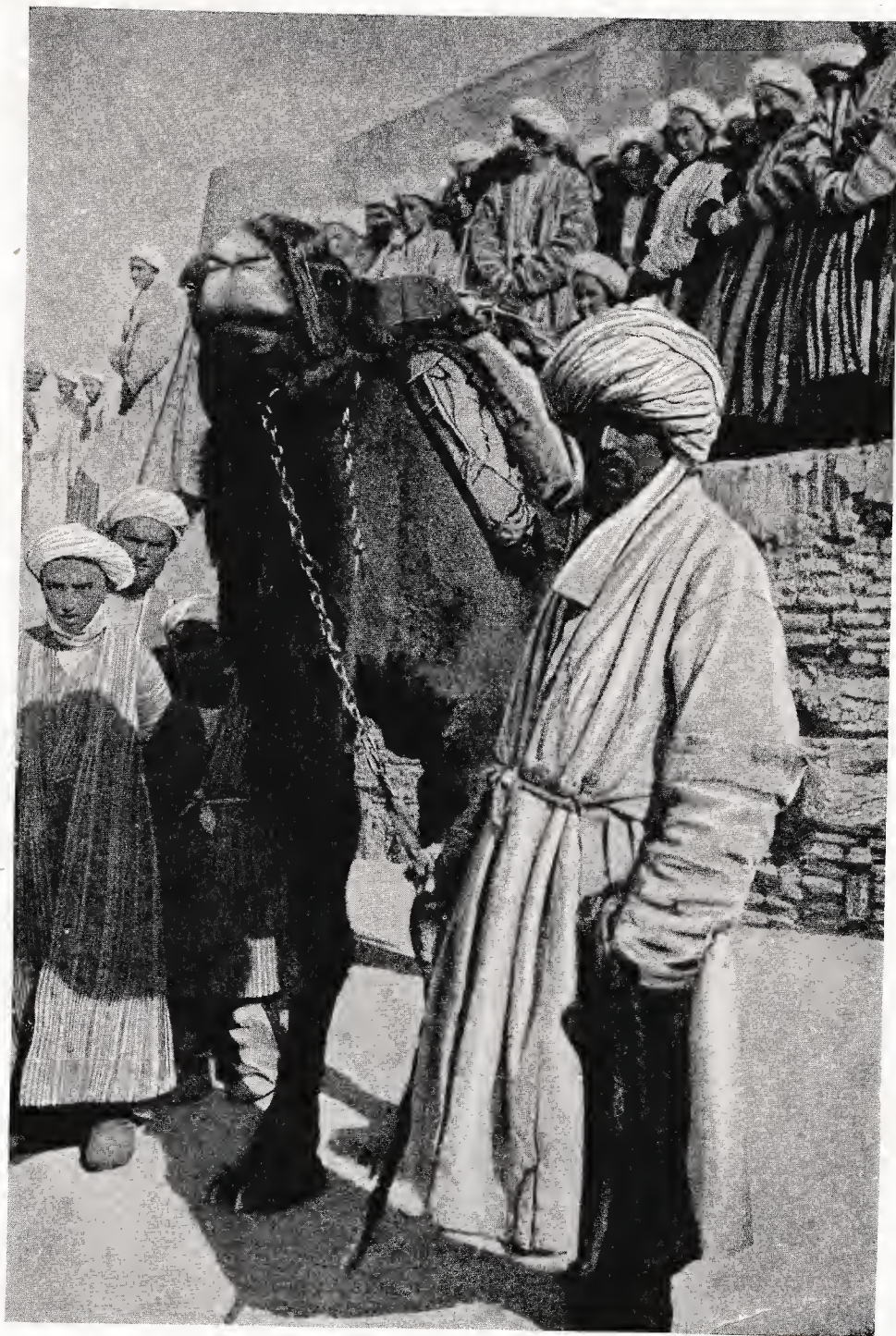
*Photo, Sardar Ikbāl Ali Shah*

important influence on the commerce, trade, or industry of the country.

The Ameer used to be the ruler of the land; but all questions of detail the Russians left to their Agent, who was without doubt the actual authority. But with the appearance of the Soviet system of government in Russia, Bokhara declared its independence till

the Young Uzbeg Party declared a form of representative government and dethroned Syed Mir Alim, the Ameer of Bokhara, August 29th, 1919. The Bokharian Ameer is in exile, and now is a guest of the Ameer of Afghanistan. Three representatives from every province of Bokhara are elected, and an assembly of 27 members under the





#### A MASTERFUL CAMELMAN OF THE DESERT IN THE REGISTAN

He has only come marketing in the splendid square of Bokhara city, as he used to do in the days of Russian rule. Yet amid the little mongrel townfolk, the tall, powerful tribesman feels the old sense of mastery revive. Once more the riders of the sands have the city at their mercy. It is not wise for the merchants to cheat them now

*Photo. Maynard Owen Williams*



## BOKHARA & ITS PEOPLES

guidance of Abdur Rahim Khan controls the Bokharian Republican Government. They are in close touch with Afghanistan, and time is not far distant when a great Central Asian Confederacy will be organized, possibly under the leadership of Ameer Amanullah, Ameer of Kabul. Subject-kings or Begs govern the extensive country under the Ameer, and there exists a whole range of subsidiary titles; many of these, however, are relics of olden times, and have little real meaning.

### Nomad Farmers of the Steppes

The Ameer modelled his army on European lines after Bokhara became the vassal of Russia, and though it is supposed to embody a force of 40,000, probably 10,000 of these men exist only on paper. Bokharian officers, trained by the Russians, give Russian words of command, and uniform and weapons are after the Russian style.

The different conditions, varying climate, etc., generate widely different modes of life among the inhabitants. Where there is loess soil on the plain, where the banks of the mountain rivers are broad enough, or where an arable terrace occurs in the hilly regions, farming prevails, and the people are not nomadic; but where agriculture is limited by Nature, cattle-farming is carried on, and since it is necessary to follow the herbage there is a considerable semi-nomadic section of the population.

### Beautiful Almond-Eyed Tajik Women

There are two principal races, Persians or Tajiks, probably descendants of the Persian slaves introduced by Turcomans; and the Turkish race of Uzbeks, now the governing class. The few Arabs are remnants from the Arab religious invasion in the seventh century. The Hindus, who are, as a rule, bankers, especially in Bokhara and Karshi, never settle in the land; Armenian merchants, Jews, and gipsies form the remainder. The mountain Tajiks are peaceable peasants, half nomads when necessary, but preferring agriculture; those of the plains resemble them in

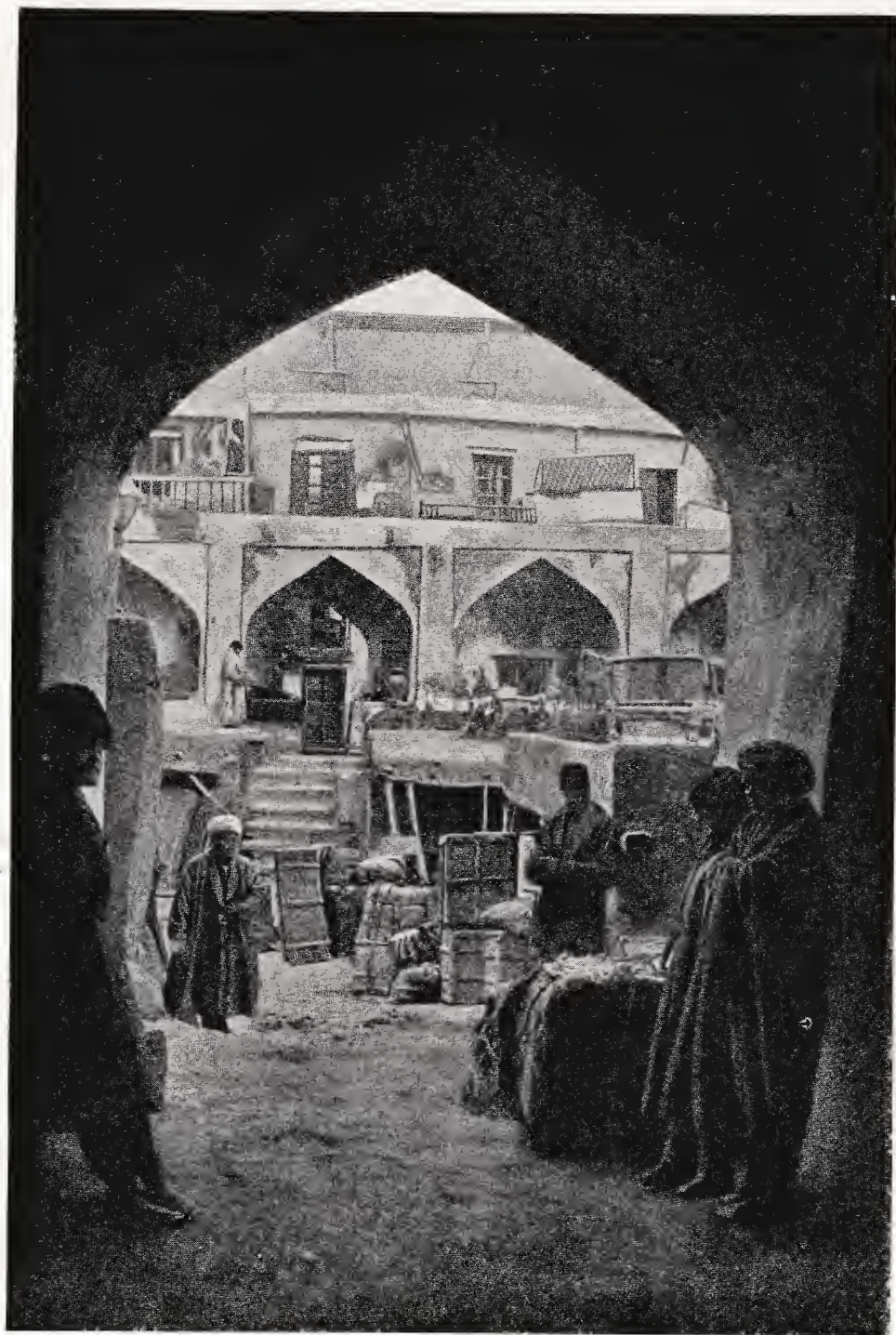
their fine features. The Tajik women are very beautiful, small of stature, but with almond-shaped, large black eyes, and coal-black hair; their complexions are pale, due to the habit of wearing the veil and their indoor life. The Uzbeks remind one more of the Mongolian, except that they are better-looking and have larger eyes; in gait and general bearing they are inferior to the Tajiks. The Turcomans, who were once nomads, are now agriculturists in the irrigated oases, and semi-nomadic on the steppes, where they live in their round felt tents just as do the Kirghiz, whose manner of life they have adopted. Very few of them can read or write, and the more wealthy Turcomen keep a Tajik mullah as secretary and teacher for their children. Chaghtai, a dialect of Turkish, is the language most spoken in Bokhara; with it at his command, the traveller can make himself understood with most of the people whom he may meet.

### A Curious Mixture of Religions

To comprehend the religious history of the country needs close study of records reaching back to "the irrecoverable deeps of time." In the fifth and sixth centuries Christianity had a footing; in the seventh century there were sharp struggles between Islam and the Parsees, and in the end Islam conquered. At the beginning of the eighth century the Koran was translated in Bokhara into Persian, so that the Tajiks were able to read it. The old religion of Zarathustra, however, was too firmly established in the hearts of the Eastern Bokhara people to be eradicated, and many of its customs hold their own even at the present time.

One Parsee custom still practised is the celebration of the spring festival, when the roof-pillars of the dwellings are crowned with ears of corn; and in remote regions other flickers of the still living Parsee faith are found—discountenanced, of course, by the ecclesiastics. Sufism, the more tolerant form of Islam, is now a favoured cult in Bokhara. Under the Sunnite princes the town was noted for learning and



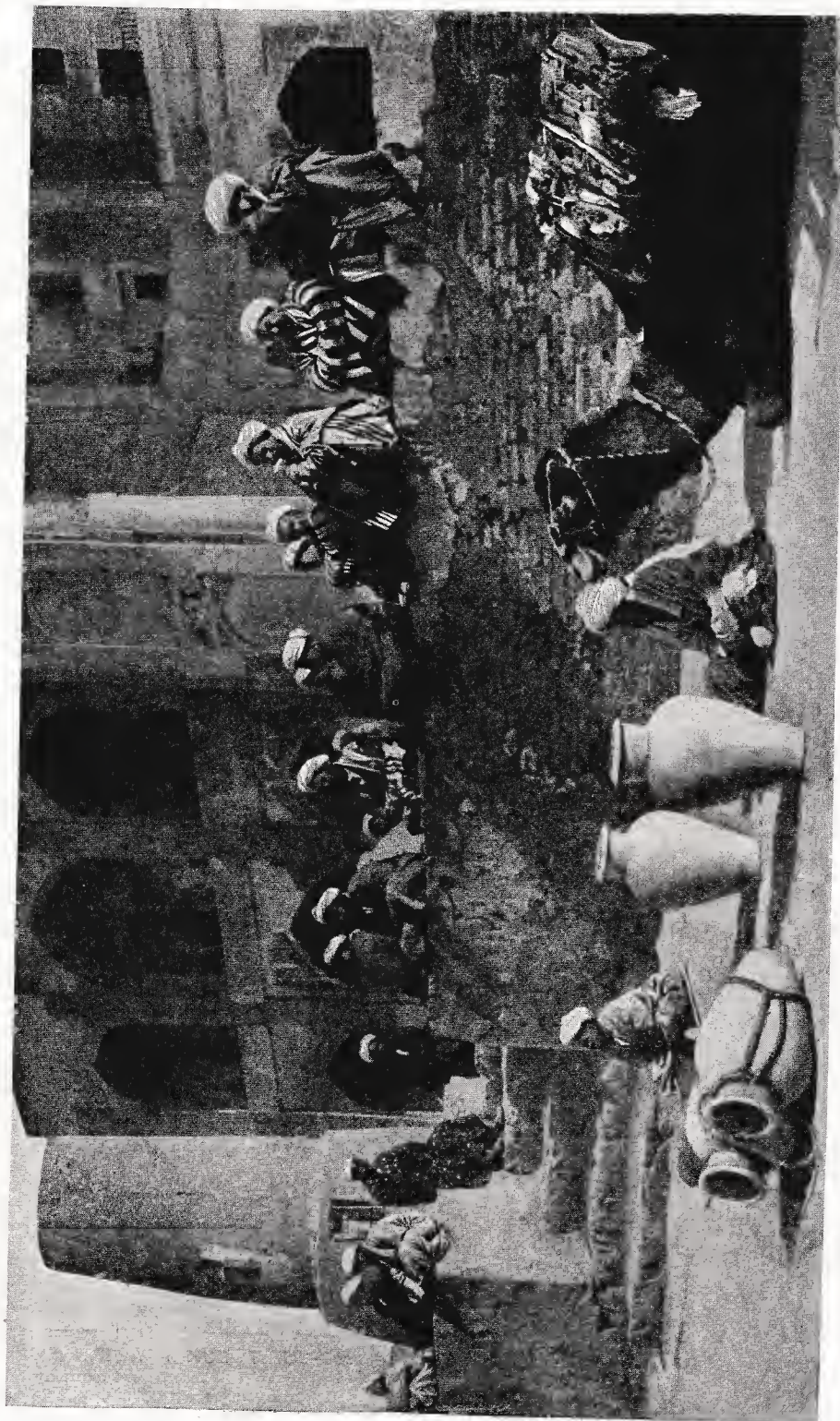


PICTURESQUE COURTYARD OF AN OLD MUD-BUILT BOKHARA INN

Though decked in a wonderful iridescence of colours, and peopled by men in many-hued garments, Bokhara is mainly made of sun-dried mud bricks, like this romantic-looking khan, or inn. Accommodation is primitive but cheap, and it suits the desert men with goods to sell, as the dark archway, that frames the scene, communicates with a dim, busy, covered bazaar

*Photo, Maynard Owen Williams*

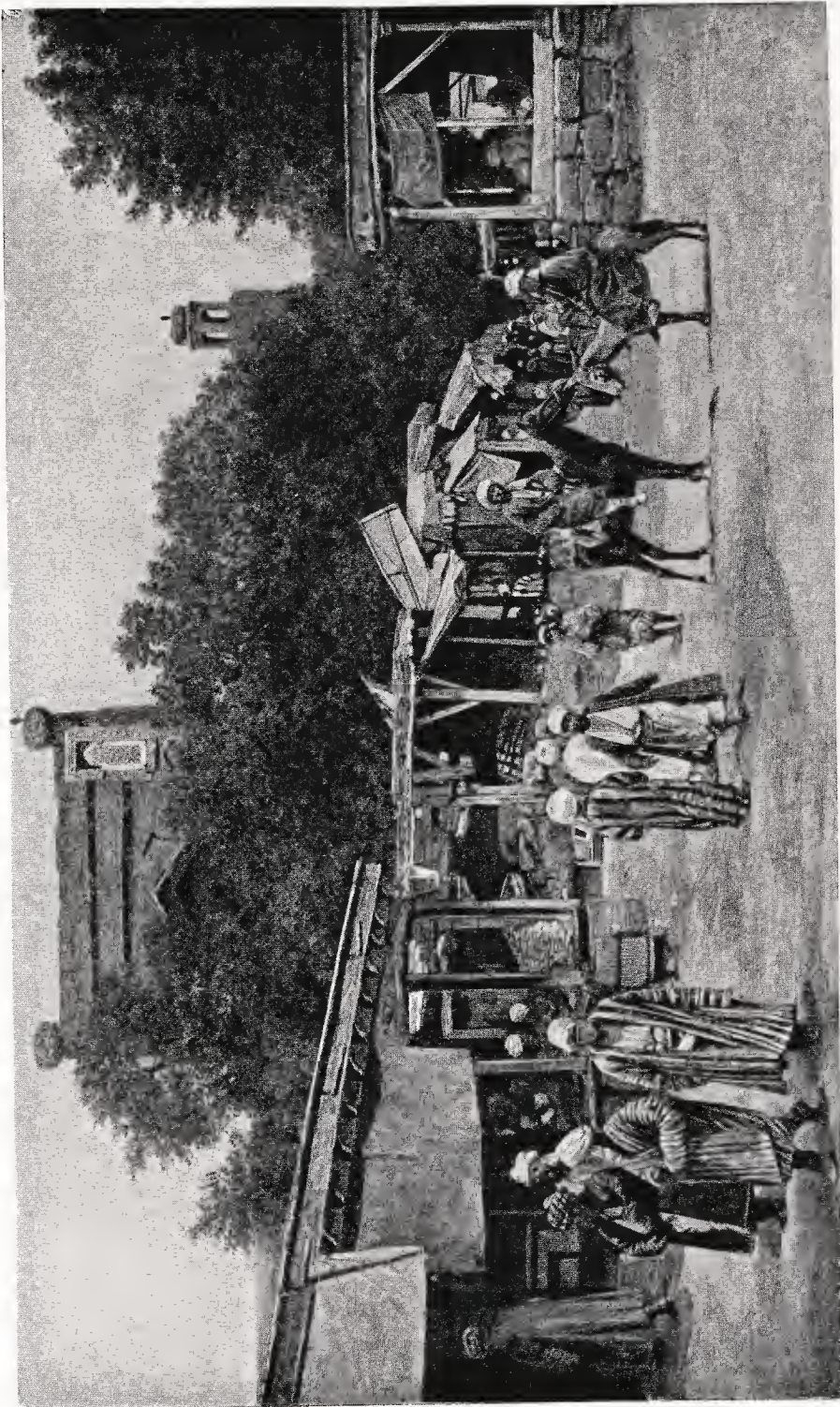




THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ASIA, THE MIR ARAB OF BOKHARA, AND SOME FAR-TRAVELLED SCHOLARS. Finely designed, with beautiful lecture halls, the Mir Arab, chief of more than five score lesser Bokhara colleges, exercises a great influence upon all Oriental Islam. It attracts both young and aged Moslems from Russia to Chirya. A few of them are sunning themselves after a lecture, and seem to find it thirsty work, judging by the large water jars the camelman has brought for them. Their robes are of gorgeous colourings

*Photo, Maynard Owen Williams*





#### THE REGISTAN, OR GRAND MARKET-PLACE, OF OLD BOKHARA

This is the busy, main square of the city, that has been rebuilt many times in the course of some two thousand years of Bokharian culture. It is now bounded by the huge fortress town of the Ameer, walling in his palace and gardens, his ministers' mansions, the prison, and water tanks. Marvellous is the blaze of colours in the religious services in the square, conducted every Friday from the portal of the Ameer's castle



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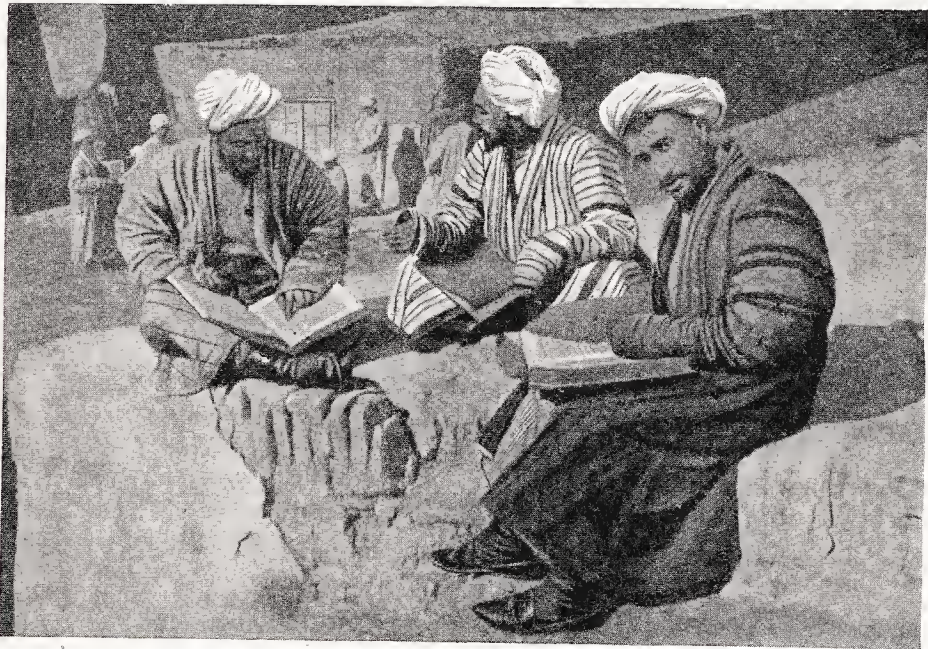
culture in the ninth and tenth centuries, but this intellectual refinement was due to some admixture of the sciences known through Arabia with the Sunnite theology.

The lighter aspects of life in Bokhara, its amusements and games, are in general associated with religious festivals, shooting at a tethered animal from a horse at full gallop being one favourite sport. Fights between animals are also popular; in Bokhara every rich man has his game-rams for this purpose. The dancing boys are greatly in favour as an amusement.

One can hardly term dentistry a "sport," but the dentist, or more strictly, the tooth-drawer, always attracts a delighted crowd. The only equipment is a couple of wooden stools and a primitive forceps. The patient sits on the ground, his head being squeezed between the knees of the assistant; the "dentist" stands behind, puts his hand across the assistant's shoulder into the mouth of the sufferer,

using his arm as a lever and the shoulder of his subordinate as fulcrum; and then the crowd begins to enjoy itself hugely. For illness and disease generally superstitious preventives are regarded as of greater importance than medicine or surgery, and mullahs, quacks, and wise women thrive. The air is supposed to be filled with evil spirits, and as a safeguard small silver charm-discs are worn in the cap or about the clothes containing written prayers.

The food is principally fresh fruit, bread, and rice in summer, with Chinese tea or water. On their journeys the Bokharians carry dried fruit, chiefly raisins, apricots, pistachios, mulberries, and perhaps fresh melons, which are plentiful and cheap. Meat is not an everyday dish, even with the wandering cattle-farming tribes. Furniture being unknown, in the houses meals are served on a piece of coloured cotton, or an embroidered carpet, spread on the floor. As to the animal life of the country, on the level lands antelope, deer,

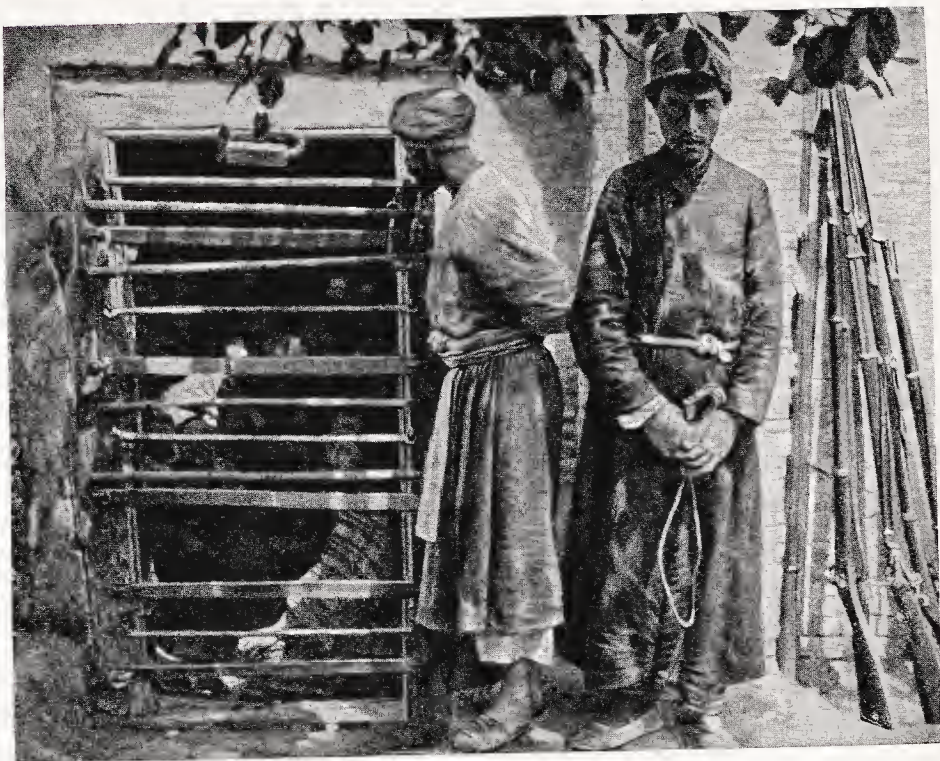


THREE WHITE-TURBANED, RAINBOW-ROBED MULLAHS OF BOKHARA

Thousands of men like these are now flocking to the great seat of Islam learning in Central Asia to study the immense number of old books of wisdom accumulated there, and discuss the future of their faith. The breakdown of their conquerors, the Russians, and the disasters of their kinsmen, the Turks, have inspired them with new hopes and fears

*Photo, Maynard Owen Williams*





**THE TERRIBLE PRISON IN THE AMEER'S LOVELY PALACE GROUNDS**  
 Outside are two of the executioners, with armed warders just out of sight. Within, a hapless mob of captives, in hot, stifling, fetid gloom, has crowded forward for a breath of fresh air, but now withdraws, most of the men fearing they may be called out to die. In former days some Britons sadly learnt the Black Hole horrors of this Bokhara prison

and the wild donkey are found, while the tiger, bear, wolf, eagle, and vulture are common in the more remote localities.

Agriculture in the Ameerate is only possible in those regions where irrigation may be effected through artificial means, consequently the people of Bokhara are experts in planning canals and waterways. This feat is commendable for the reason that no elaborate methods, such as are employed in European countries, are available. In the mountainous parts, where the loess stratum thinly covers the stony soil, the crops are most miserable; but in the plains, where the yellowish-grey loess is free from stones, the production is at its best.

The unsettled state of the country in the past is responsible for much neglect on the part of the farmers, for most of them take a very inadequate care of the land. Only those who have the means for employing labour and are sufficiently strong to hold their own against official

encroachment succeed in this direction. Influential landowners used to secure special favour from the Ameer or his Begs to receive a fixed amount of water, and allowed none of it, even when they had ample to spare, to any lesser farmers.

The actual system of cultivation is interesting in so far as the various species of grain are not sown in any regular order; much depends upon the whim of the farmer, and still more upon the demands of the market. Like other Eastern countries, the necessities of life are few in Bokhara, and in this respect a farmer can support his family by cultivating as small a piece of land as half an acre. Among the most valued grains are wheat and rice, but barley is equally important to the livestock keepers, who use it for the horses, and as it requires very little water, almost every horse-breeder keeps a large barley farm. Nothing, however, can take the place of millet, whose flour provides



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bread for the poor and the nomadic population of the country. In some cases they roast this grain, reduce it to a powder, carrying it in a small bag on their horses; then during night halts in a long steppe journey a small quantity of water is added to a portion of the powder and their dinner is ready.

Bokhara is famous for its melons, of which many qualities exist. When mixed with cooked rice they form a very

desirable dish. Water melons of rare sweetness are often carried as a supply of water. In the gardens of well-to-do Bokharians one may notice fruit-trees of various kinds. Chief among them are apples, peaches, apricots, and others, while figs grow almost wild. The mulberry is also typical of Bokhara. It not only affords shade and food, but the silk industry depends almost wholly upon its cultivation.



THE FACILE TOUCH OF ROMANCE IN MODERN CRUMBLING BOKHARA  
This blind alley of Sart donkeymen, with ruined tower and sagging wall, looks a fine bit of street scenery. The antique effect, however, is mainly achieved by recent climatic agencies on jerry-built structures of mud brick. A prolonged tempest of rain would damage a large part of the city more than a raid by ravaging nomads

*Photo, Miss C. Y. Hunter*